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THREE LETTERS
ON
CONFIRMATION

48.840.







THREE LETTERS

FROM A

MOTHER TO HER CHILDREN,

PREVIOUS TO, AND CONSEQUENT UPON,

CONFIRMATION;

BY

MRS. C. R. DICKEN.

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them ;

"And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."—*2nd Epistle to Timothy*, 3. 14, 15.

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PREFACE.

IN presenting this little work for general circulation, I sincerely trust my motives will not be misunderstood.

These letters were written for the use of my own children, and are addressed to them. In the hope that they may be found acceptable and serviceable to other young candidates for Confirmation beyond my own circle, I have been induced to give them publicity in their present form.

If I am permitted to be the humble instrument of impressing upon the minds of the young the importance of their Baptismal Covenant, with the great and unspeakable comfort which arises from Prayer, and of aiding their endeavours to receive with humility and benefit the Holy Communion, I shall be most thankful that I thus employed some of the weary and trying hours of sickness ; and I shall have the still further satisfaction of feeling that what I have written has not been altogether in vain.

LONDON, *March 3rd*, 1848.



LETTER I.

THE IMPORTANCE

OF

CONFIRMATION.

“Make me to go in the path of thy commandments: for therein is my desire.”—*Ps.* 119. 35.

MY DEAR CHILDREN,

The time is again approaching, when the Bishop who is placed over us will stand among the people; when he will exhort the young Christians of his Diocese to diligent prayer; when he will lay his hands upon them and will bless them.

It behoves all young candidates for Confirmation to be careful in preparing for that act—that solemn taking upon themselves of the vows made for them at the Sacrament of their Baptism, while yet they were ignorant of the advantages then conferred; when they understood not the value or the privilege of being received into the bosom of the Church as Regenerate; when they were un-

conscious of the hallowing "virtue of prayer,"* and of that sacred Ordinance in which they received the name of Christian. In their helpless babyhood the blessed sign of the cross was placed upon their foreheads, thus declaring their future profession as soldiers and servants of Christ; the fitting vows were registered by the Sponsors selected by their Parents, and three great promises were made.

First,—“That they should renounce the Devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh.”

Secondly,—“That they should believe all the articles of the Christian faith.”

Thirdly,—“That they should keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life.”

In addressing you, my dear Children, my object is to lay before you, and to shew you the importance of the promises made by your Sponsors; and to explain, simply and earnestly, the nature of Confirmation. I would lead you gently, but firmly, to an earnest consideration of the solemn ceremony; and I would urge you most anxiously to open your hearts before God in humble prayer, and to ask his assistance in fitting you to partake of this holy rite.

* Article 27..

Henceforth, my Children, you will be professing Christians; you will have "put on the whole armour of God." * His heavenly grace will be your defence; His almighty hand your protection and guide; His blessing your constant dependence.

To be *confirmed* then, let me assure you, is no trivial act; it involves no light obligation. Arrived at years of discretion, having learned what your Godfathers and Godmothers promised for you in your Baptism, you must of your own consent, and with your own mouth, ratify and confirm the same; and you must also promise that, by the grace of God, and his ever ready help, you will evermore endeavour faithfully to observe all those things to which you have thus assented. The Bishop will ask you this solemn question, "*Do you here, in the presence of God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your baptism, ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe, and to do, all those things which your Godfathers and Godmothers then undertook for you?*"

It will be your duty to reply fearlessly, yet with humility, "*I do.*"

Remember, at that moment the Almighty's ears will be open, and the honesty and purity of your

* Ephesians 6. 11.

resolve will be recorded. It will be a solemn moment. Remember what it is you are thus publicly promising. Recollect that you are vowing a vow to God, "unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid."*

That simple and emphatic *I do*, if uttered with earnestness and sincerity, will rise with a joyous and glorious echo to the Mercy Seat; it will be the seal set to your faith; it will be your warrant for constant communion with God. Am I not right, then, when I tell you that this is no light obligation? You are publicly, before the face of the congregation, renewing your baptismal vow; you are promising in person what your Sponsors had before promised for you, to fulfil that most solemn vow; and our Church will receive you, and assures you of divine protection and encouragement, while it enables you to accomplish and arrive at that end towards which your prayers and endeavours aim. Let me entreat you then, in all affection, not to be lukewarm in seeking the blessing of the Church. While you are kneeling with humility at the Altar, remember with holy awe in whose presence you are, raise your thoughts to God, and cry with an earnest voice and a hopeful heart, "*Bless me, even me also, O my Father.*"

The ceremony of laying on of hands, in token

* Collect in the Communion Service.

of conferring a blessing, is not one of recent date ; —we read of it both in the Old and in the New Testament ; and the literal meaning of the word “ Confirm ” is, not only to ratify, but to settle, to perfect, to establish, or to strengthen.

When Joshua was to be set apart as the successor of Moses, “ The Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and *lay thine hand upon him.*” * Again, in the Acts of the Apostles, we find that, when the seven Deacons were chosen, the whole multitude set them before the Apostles, and when they had prayed “ *they laid their hands on them,*” † also, that when Peter and John went to Samaria, “ *they laid their hands*” ‡ upon the disciples there who had been baptised ; when it is added, “ and they received the Holy Ghost.”

The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, joins together “ the doctrine of baptisms, and of *laying on of hands,*” § as among the first principles of Christianity. On these grounds, and following “ the example of the Holy Apostles,” our Church urges those who have come to years of discretion, to present themselves before the Bishop of the diocese, to confirm and ratify the promises made for them at their baptism, and to receive his benediction, certifying them of God’s favour, and imploring for

* Numbers 27. 18. † Acts 6. 6. ‡ Acts 8. 17. § Heb. 6. 2.

them His divine assistance. To you then, my dear Children, who are now able to consider and to judge, I address myself: I wish you to meditate upon God, and His great mercy towards you; and to turn to Him in prayer. I wish you to feel in your inmost hearts, and adopt courageously as your own, what your sponsors promised for you in your tender infancy, while yet the impress of innocence was upon your brows. I entreat you, in all earnestness and love, to become candidates without delay for this spiritual benediction, so that you may be indeed "members of Christ," and enrolled as "children of God."

First,—Your sponsors promised for you that you should "renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh."

When first this beautiful world was formed; when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and illumined the great deep; when the bright and glorious day issued from the darkness of a long night; when every living creature that moves upon the face of the earth was made by that Almighty hand; and, lastly, when man was created in His own image, and after His likeness, and every thing that moved was put under the dominion of man, and pronounced by the Great Creator to be "*very good*;" even then this enemy to God,

this rebellious spirit, the Devil, found his way into the new made Eden, and by his pestilential presence defaced the brightness of its original beauty; his baneful influence was spread over the fair young world, and his insinuating poison was inhaled by its too credulous inhabitants. Our first mother listened to the voice which told her "*You shall not surely die,*" and then it was that disobedience

"Brought death into the world and all our woe."

From that fatal moment we became captive to his will. He has uninterruptedly exercised his power to work against God; he has opposed the voice of God, that "still small voice," when our consciences would have acknowledged Him; and he has endeavoured to mingle poison with that Almighty love, with which God gave for our redemption His only and well-beloved Son.

Be not afraid, if, in the solitude of your chamber, or the solemn stillness of the night, you hear the voice of the Lord God, saying, as it did to the fallen inhabitant of Paradise, "*Where art thou?*"* Be ready to answer with holy awe and piety, as did the infant Samuel, "*Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.*"†

You are, then, called upon to "renounce" this enemy to your peace. You are bound to do so by your baptismal vow; you must cast him from

* Genesis 3. 9.

† 1 Samuel 3. 9.

you as you would a loathsome serpent; you must fly from him as from a pestilence. I entreat you, let not the evil one triumph over the ruin of your soul; let him not trample down and extinguish the spark of goodness which God's grace has newly kindled. Throw off the trammels of the devil, and pass "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God;" * acknowledge Christ as your master, and you will "find rest unto your souls," for, "His yoke is easy, and His burden is light."† You are called upon, also, to renounce this wicked world. We are told by St. James, "the friendship of the world is enmity with God;" ‡ and St. John says, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." § The longing for earthly power, "the lust of the eyes and the pride of life," || these are "not of the Father," they are "of the *world*." The covetous desires of the world, the perpetual wishing for possession, and the longing for enjoyment, these you are called upon to renounce.

It was by the lust of the eyes that our first mother fell: we are told, "When the woman *saw* that the tree was good for food, and that it was *pleasant to the eyes*, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did

* Rom. 8. 21. † Matt. 11. 29, 30. ‡ James 4. 4.

§ 1 John 2. 15.

|| 1 John 2. 16.

eat.”* Such, then, are the pomps and the vanity you are called upon to renounce. And how is this to be accomplished? I answer, by God’s help, to be sought by diligent prayer; and by a careful and constant perusal of that holy Book, which, as it has been remarked by a great writer,† *“has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.”*

You must heartily and entirely surrender yourselves to God, “which is your reasonable service.”‡ You must say, with perfect sincerity and truth, *“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.”*§

If you, my beloved Children, are early given to God, and dedicated to His service, this renunciation “of the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh,” will prove no difficult matter. *“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”*||

Look stedfastly to the bright reward of a faithful perseverance to the end, a crown of righteousness, life, and glory in heaven; and, though trouble, and sorrow, and persecution afflict you here, and bow you almost to the dust, remember always that “there is a reward for the righteous,”¶ “there is

* Gen. 3. 6.

† Locke.

‡ Rom. 12. 1.

§ Ps. 119. 37.

|| Prov. 4. 23.

¶ Ps. 58. 11.

And now, dear child, the Father of all is
speaking to you. He is the Father of
all men and women. He is the Father of
all the world.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ALEXANDRIA

sorrow and sin, your very life, will be made new. God the Son hath redeemed you, He hath bought you in His arms, as the strong arms of a father, the fold from which you are so precious. He has sent love sounds sweet and soft, and the groans of a father's heart. He has sent the Cross and suffered death for you. He has bought you with a price. He has redeemed you with His precious blood-shedding. And now He calls you, "Come now, and I will give you rest, for ye are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, and I will wipe away the drooping sin."

Do you need a Comforter? The Holy Spirit, the Creed teaches you to believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who sanctified you, and all the world. Seek Him and He will come and dwell in you, and when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.

We must, now, what by faith, we must believe that our time spent in this world is a time of probation, which, if spent well, will win us a place in that distant and unseen world. This, beautiful as it is, can be but the first step.

In the third place, it was promised that we should "keep God's holy will and commandments, that we may abide in His love, and all the days of our lives we may bring forth much fruit to the glory of the Father." This is the true test of our faith, and the true way to the life.

yourselves, surely : you will require constantly and for ever the holy guidance of your Heavenly Father. He must "lead you beside the still waters."* His "rod and His staff must comfort you."† Love and pursue virtue, because, by doing so, you prove your love to God, your devotion to Him, your submission to His authority. "Walk in the law of the Lord."‡ Remember always, (and remember it devoutly) that you are the Children of God—the Children of His adoption ; made by Him, redeemed by His blessed Son, and sanctified by His Holy Spirit. God, the living God, glorious in majesty, and almighty in power, is your *Father*. Be not, then, undutiful children ; serve Him with a pure faith, and a sincere heart ; be earnest in prayer, and bear in mind the expressive and beautiful words of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, "*I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" §

I have now shewn you, as simply and as briefly as I could, the several particulars of your Baptismal covenant, which you are soon going to ratify and confirm. Let me, in a few more words, shew you the benefits which will result from Confirmation. You will be then admitted to the full privileges of Christ's Church. You will be in closer communion with Him ; the influence of His Holy Spirit will fall

* Ps. 23. 2. † Ps. 23. 4. ‡ Ps. 119. 1. § Ps. 37. 25.

upon you like the reviving dew to the parched flower, and will fill you with all love, and hope, and confidence.

This act will quicken your Spiritual manhood, the grace of God will be as a holy fountain refreshing you in your earthly pilgrimage; and your public ratification of the vows made at your Baptism will be a landmark to your souls, and the memory of it will be pleasant. You will be a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people,"* for God will be ever with you; and though you should walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need fear no evil, for He will comfort you, and guide you into all peace. I trust you will never in after years forget the high privilege to which you will be admitted, when the Bishop shall have laid his hands upon you and blessed you.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper will form a subject of another address to you on some future day; and now no more remains for me to do but to bid you for a time affectionately farewell, and, in so doing, I commit you in all confidence to the care of Him who careth for all. May He ever lead you by His love, and eventually receive you into His glorious kingdom.

* 1 Peter 2. 9.

LETTER II.

COMFORT IN PRAYER.

"I hope in thy word."—*Ps.* 119. 114.

WHEN I last addressed you, my dear Children, it was to urge you to a diligent consideration of the duties required of you previous to your receiving the rite of Confirmation.

I hope my words, written with all earnestness, were not wasted upon the idle wind, but rather that they fell upon your hearts, and ripened to perfection the seed of God's grace, which was sown in them at your infant baptism.

Before I proceed to address you upon the duties necessary, preparatory to your receiving the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ, I would add a few words of affectionate entreaty; I would urge you to a diligent preparation for that solemn feast,—a rigid self-examination. I would ask you to surrender your hearts to that God who will abundantly pardon; and to pray to Him to clothe you with humility, as with a garment.

To obtain your desires, and to attain a holy state of being, you must throw yourselves at the footstool of the Father, in prayer. You must approach with humility and with reverence, earnestly looking towards Him who is the "author and finisher of our faith." *

Prayer is an act of Adoration, a noble privilege, and an exercise of a power which God has given you. It is also an act of Supplication. It is by prayer we seek God's comfort. It is by prayer we ask for pardon. It is by prayer we are allowed permission to address that Great and Glorious Being, The Eternal, who fills all things living with the brightness of His majesty, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. †

Are any among you in trouble? need I speak to you, or urge upon *you* the great Comfort of prayer—that solace to the afflicted, who cry aloud in the solemn night watches? Sinful and wretched, you know that your God, your just Judge, will hear you. "Ask, and it shall be given you," ‡ is a promise remembered with unwavering faith. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day, the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." § Though man should despise you and turn away in his displeasure, yet you know

* Heb. 12. 2.

† Isa. 55. 8, 9.

‡ Matt. 7. 7.

§ Ps. 139. 12.

"we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." *

Are any among you ill? need I remind you in your sickness and your suffering to open your hearts to God, and seek His divine assistance? Think not upon your own sorrows alone, but look with pure faith upon the promises of God, for they are many and gracious. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." † Throw yourselves with perfect confidence, yet with humility, upon His fatherly mercy. Who can so well support your faltering steps? "When I said my foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." ‡ Who but the good Shepherd of Israel can refresh your drooping souls? "In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee, for Thou wilt answer me." § Who but the Saviour of the world can guide you through the quicksands of sin, and place you safe in that haven where you would be? The Lord is "Our Father," and in this relation we address Him when we utter that prayer which was taught us by His blessed Son. "*After this manner pray ye,*" || were the words which preceded that form so comprehensive, so significant, and yet so simple. How the heart responds to the melody of love, as those few, but

* 1 John 2. 1.

† Ps. 102. 17.

‡ Ps. 94. 18.

§ Ps. 86. 7.

|| Matt. 6. 9.

sublime words, awake the chords of piety in your souls! We are taught in this prayer to come to God as our Heavenly Father; by this endearing title we address Him when we seek His aid to hallow His glorious name. We pray that the kingdom of Christ may be so spread over the earth, that God's will may be done *here* as it is in heaven.*

We are poor and needy, faint and way-worn; and we seek from the God of Heaven our daily bread,† knowing that He who fed the children of Israel with the "heaven-dropped" manna, will also feed those who call upon Him in their necessity and their woe. Conscious, as we must be, that we are guilty of daily sin, either of omission or commission, we must remember also that, when we petition for forgiveness, there is a condition attached to our supplication, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."‡ Can we prefer this request if we in our hearts feel enmity towards our neighbours, or if we cannot earnestly and entirely forgive?

When we are prostrate at His footstool, kneeling, as it were, in His immediate presence, can we presume to foster in our hearts any ungenerous feeling? Can we hope to be forgiven if we do not with truly penitent hearts freely and frankly

* Matt. 6. 9.

† Matt. 6. 11.

‡ Matt. 6. 12.

forgive? The answer is obvious; the truth apparent.

Should the world with its pleasures allure us, or seduce us from our fealty to our God; should it steep us in sin, and overwhelm us with grief, we pray that we may be saved from temptation and trial, and delivered from evil; and we conclude our petitions with this acknowledgement, that God's is the kingdom, and His the power, and His the glory, for ever.*

Thus you see, my dear Children, the holy Jesus provides for you—in all your wants He sympathises. He teaches you *how* to pray, and out of His great mercy will give you also strength by prayer. There is an error into which many practical Christians may fall; it is, that of requiring some *sign* of the favour of God, some internal testimony of His gracious acceptance of your hearts' inmost and best offerings. Does this spring from a selfish nature, or from an earnest religious sincerity? This is a question we must honestly ask ourselves in the privacy of our own closets, when our hearts are humble and alone with God. Let us not be discouraged, nor fail to persist in Prayer, because we are without any sensible or positive reply to our fervent supplications. We must be careful that we do not account the Divine Being, to whom

* Matt. 6. 13.

we owe every thing that is good and effectually lovely, our debtor, instead of our free and liberal rewarder.

By impatiently and anxiously expecting an *assurance* of God's favour towards us, we are guilty of the great sin of doubting the mercy of that Being to whom our prayers are addressed, and who has told us in His holy word that "it is good for us to wait." * We must rely upon His words, which are merciful and many, for He has promised the help of His Holy Spirit to those who ask, and in His good time we shall receive the expected, the long and ardently-desired blessing. We must have perfect faith—not the speculative, doctrinal faith of controversy, which has divided the Church of Christ, and has clouded, in a degree, the Christian horizon; but faith—pure, undimmed faith—the entire trustingness of a helpless child; the perfect reliance upon the promises, as well as upon the power of the Almighty. Let us remember the ready devotion of the first disciples of our Lord; "*Follow me,*" † was sufficient for them. Dare we contest the point with our Redeemer?

In the pride and presumption of our hearts *we* require to know *whither* we must follow. "O ye of little faith" ‡ may well apply to us. During our Christian childhood, when we are weak and

* *Lamen.* 3. 26.

† John 1. 43.

‡ Matt. 6. 30.

oft times wavering, let us not fancy ourselves arrived at Christian manhood, nor, in the pride of our intellect, boast of our visions and our dreams : but let us be clothed with humility. "Let us rend our *hearts* and not our garments, and turn unto the Lord our God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." *

Instead of arrogating to ourselves the power of the philosopher, or the wisdom which springs from knowledge, let us lie meekly at the feet of Jesus, for it is our fittest posture and our proper place ; and He who gathered the lambs with His arms, and carried them in His bosom, and placed them in the safe green pasture of His heavenly love, will as surely raise *you* from this lowly position at His footstool, and will gently lead you beside the pure waters of comfort, there to abide for ever with the good Shepherd of Israel, in peace, security, and love.

Let us remember the penitent of Capernaum, and what the blessed Jesus said to her. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much." † She shewed her humility by clinging to the feet of the Lord; and this very humility laid bare the piety of her soul. Wherever the gospel is preached, the similar faith of Mary of Bethany will be recorded. ‡

* Joel 2. 13. † Luke 7. 47. See Macknight's Harmony, 43.

‡ Matt. 26. 13. John 11. 2.

"It is better to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud,* for "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."† Humility is a robe of homely texture now, but it is also one which will grow into splendour and beauty unspeakable, when the morning dawn of Christ's coming ripens into the perfect day, when we shall behold the Son of God seated on His throne; when we shall see Him as He is, clothed in might, and majesty, and glory.

The genuineness of prayer, and its acceptance by our merciful Father, do not depend so much upon its *effects* as upon the *motives* by which it is occasioned, and the frame of mind in which the person is, who prostrates himself, and opens his heart, with all its weakness and its woes, at God's footstool. "Let us not be weary in well doing."‡ We must "pray without ceasing."§ We must pray humbly, devoutly, earnestly, and God in His own good time will give the increase. Let us not grow weary because this is delayed. Peace and joy must come at last, either here or hereafter,—for so has our Father promised,—and it is good for us to wait patiently. It is our duty to pray, to pray constantly, even should we have no assurance that our Father listens. But He does listen; His graci-

* Prov. 16. 19.

† James 4. 6.

‡ Gal. 6. 9.

§ 1 Thess. 5. 17.

ous ears are ever open to our cry ; and when it is good for us to obtain an assurance of His having received our supplications, He will in His great mercy make known to us that He has heard. It may be that He will speak to us in the whirlwind, the thunder, and the lightning, or death may tell us He is near, but He loves best to speak to His servants in the still small voice of mercy ; and though, in our terror, we may have wrapped our faces in our mantles, and fallen to the earth through fear, yet, amid the noise and tumult of the tempest, and the rushing of the mighty waters, which would go nigh to overwhelm our souls, we see a light glimmer from a glorious land, we hear those words of comfort, and hope, and joy, sounding melodiously to the drooping traveller, "*Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ;*" and the "rest" which is here promised is not merely a cessation from trouble ; it is a holy repose ; it is to recline as did the disciple whom He loved, on the bosom of Jesus.

Should we feel, after much supplication, that our prayers remain unanswered, and should we fear that they are not heard, let us not for a moment cease to pray ; but during the existence of this cloud of doubt, which for a time would dim our mental vision, let us remember that the holy and encouraging smile of the Son of God may be

behind the darkness, and it may be an act of infinite mercy towards us which causes Him to interpose, between the creature and the Creator, this shadowy veil. We must not, then, on this account cease to *ask*; we must not be contented to see from a *distance* the brilliant portals of the Celestial City. We must not be satisfied to catch occasional glimpses, as some have done, of the shining palaces, or only to feel for one brief instant the warmth and brightness of the everlasting sunshine of God's grace. We must go on without fear, and walk steadily by prayer, even though way-worn and sad; but, with His rod and staff as our support, we shall reach in safety the Holy Eden—the luxuriant garden of the kingdom of God.

At first, prayer which may meet with no visible assurance that it is heard by your Heavenly Father may resemble the atmosphere unwarmed by the first beams of the sun in the early morning; but, as you progress in humility and holiness, your prayers will be heard and answered, as surely as will the air, as the day advances, become warm with the sunshine which brings to maturity the treasures of vegetation. Let the light of heaven, then, fall upon your souls. At first it may be very gently, almost imperceptibly; but, by constant and persevering prayer, it will attain its meridian glory; and you will feel that the brightness and beauty of God's

love will irradiate and form around you a halo of sanctity, which no worldly power can dim, and which will eventually fit you to become Saints among the sanctified spirits who are eternally singing that mighty chorus, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." *

Be not discouraged by any difficulties, my dear Children, but go on steadily unto perfection. If you can kneel with true humility at the feet of your Lord, and say, with meekness and holy resignation, "Thy will be done," you will, I am sure, find Comfort in Prayer. You must love earnestly whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report; † if you do this without wavering, you may rest satisfied that your feet are treading the green and flowery paths of virtue and truth, and that you are by slow and certain steps drawing nearer and nearer to the Holy City, and are only waiting to hear from the mouth of the Blessed Saviour of mankind, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." ‡

I have said enough, I hope, to convince you how important humility is, to enable us to obtain and experience comfort in prayer.

* Rev. 4. 8.

† Phil. 4. 8.

‡ Matt. 25. 21.

Let us not faint, nor doubt, because our prayers are not immediately answered.

Let us not be disheartened, nor cease to offer our supplications, but let us remember, with all reverence, that the prayers of the Son of God himself were not always attended with comfort: the record of the spiritual agony in the garden of Gethsemane will testify this. Remember His posture of humility. He fell on His face and prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." * His "soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." † Christ our Saviour was not discouraged, but He prayed again the second and the third time; and I would wish you to mark well the resignation to the will of His Father. "If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, *Thy will be done.*" ‡ These were the words uttered by the Son of God, who "was wounded for our transgressions, who was bruised for our iniquities, and with whose stripes we are healed;" § who died at the express command of His Father, that He might purchase for us redemption through his precious blood-shedding, and an imperishable Crown of glory in Heaven. Let us then cast all our cares upon Him, for He careth for us, and He will surely regard our low

* Matt. 26. 39. † Matt. 26. 38. ‡ Matt. 26. 42. § Isa. 53. 5.

estate. He will listen with pity and with love; and, at the last great day, when the Lord is making up His jewels, and the redeemed and ransomed are presented to the great Creator, "She hath done what she could" * will sound sweetly in your ears, as this assurance is uttered by the Saviour's voice. "Verily there is a reward for the righteous." †

Before I conclude, let me urge upon you the necessity of pursuing with diligence your souls' salvation. How sad it would be to find at the last that "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." ‡ God grant, that, ere "the silver cord of life be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken," § we may feel that we have sought Him where He might be found, we have called upon Him while He was near; and that, when the great and terrible day arrives, we may be received into the mansions of the blest, and hear the glad welcome, "Come, ye blessed of my Father." To that God, who can and will comfort the afflicted, who will raise the broken-hearted, and who will save the penitent sinner, I fearlessly and in all love commit you, knowing that those whom He loves He chastens, and that He will bring them that endure to the end to an eternity of joy and love.

* Mark 14. 8. † Ps. 58. 11. ‡ Jer. 8. 20.

§ Ecclea. 12. 6.

LETTER III.

THE HOLY COMMUNION.

"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."—1 Cor. 11. 28.

IN my previous letters to you, my dear Children, I have endeavoured to explain the nature of Confirmation; I have also urged upon you the necessity of diligent Prayer; and I have shewn you the Comfort which arises from it. It is now my purpose, with God's assistance, to speak to you of the importance of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; to which solemn feast you will be admitted, after having publicly ratified the promises and vows made for you at your Baptism, by receiving Confirmation at the hands of the Bishop. It is an affecting and beautiful thing to see the young members of our Church crowd to the table of the Lord, to see them kneeling humbly at His Altar, while the Priest administers to them the bread and the wine, which are made emblems of

the Body and Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ. That you, my dear Children, precious gifts as you are from the Lord God Almighty, may be made fit to partake of this great privilege, is my earnest prayer.

The Lord has seen fit in establishing a Church upon earth, to ordain certain observances, whereby it may be known to be a Church. He has been pleased to make these observances means of Grace, and He has promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who rightly use them.

God ordained two such observances in the Jewish Church of old, which were, Circumcision and the Passover. In the place of these two Jewish ordinances, Christ has left us the Sacraments of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord. By Baptism we are admitted into covenant with God, as the Jews were by Circumcision; and it has, moreover, a signification expressly applicable to Christians. Baptism, to which we are admitted in our infancy, is a washing with water, in token of the spiritual cleansing away of sin. It is called "the washing of Regeneration,"* or New Birth. Your Catechism tells you, it signifies a "death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness; for being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace."

* Titus 3. 5.

The Lord's Supper has, also, a signification beyond and above that of a commemorative rite, like the Jewish Passover.

At the feast of the Passover, which Christ shared with his disciples the night before he suffered death upon the cross, He took bread, and, when he had given thanks he brake it, and said, "*Take, eat, this is my Body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*" After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."* He, moreover, commanded them to do both these things in remembrance of Him, not once only, but often—nay constantly. "This do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me;" and St. Paul tells us, "as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come."† We are ordered by our blessed Lord thus to publish and declare His death. So far the rite is chiefly commemorative: but it is more; for our Lord, in St. John's Gospel, says, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him."‡ This can only be referred to the other passages, in which He informs

* Matt. 26. 26—28. Mark 14. 22, 24. Luke 22. 19, 20.

† 1 Cor. 11. 25, 26.

‡ John 6. 56.

us what eating His flesh and drinking His blood means. It is added, "He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." * But that the medium through which this benefit is received, is Faith, is clearly expressed afterwards, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life, but there are some of you that believe not."† Such, therefore, are incapable of receiving the benefit. The Lord's Supper, then, or, as it is otherwise called, the Holy Communion,‡ was instituted for this double purpose. It imprints on our minds, by the symbols of bread broken and wine poured out, a lively image of the great sacrifice of the Cross—it brings before us a vivid recollection of that Saviour, who died for us that we might live through Him. It teaches us, that we must be united to Christ by faith, and if we are so united, "the benefit is great" indeed.

The spiritual union with Christ is the life of the soul; and the holy exercise of faith, whereby that union is promoted and evidenced, is the meat and drink of the soul, conduces to its spiritual life, and nourishes it for a life eternal in Heaven.

Before coming to the Lord's Supper, consider what

* John 6. 58.

† John 6. 63, 64. Compare 1 Cor. 11. 28, 29., 2 Cor. 13. 5.

‡ 1 Cor. 10. 16.

are the qualifications which are absolutely necessary, in order that you may be fit recipients of such a solemn favour. Your hearts must be filled with humility, faith, gratitude, and love. You must approach that holy table with a thorough knowledge of your own unworthiness—unworthiness even to eat of the crumbs that fall from it; but you must remember also, that you have been bought with a price: the Body of our Blessed Lord was broken for you, and His precious Blood was shed for you, that you might be made fit to join the saints in heaven. The holy Jesus came down from His glorious home, to seek and to save those who were lost. He healed the sick; He raised the drooping; he comforted the broken-hearted; “He went about doing good;” * “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.” † The Son of God condescends to intercede for us with His Father. A great work was appointed for Him to do,—even the salvation of man. Let us remember, with reverence and holy awe, His dying exclamation, when His precious blood was streaming, and His Body pierced with many wounds. “*It is finished,*” ‡ were the last words that fell

* Acts 10. 38.

† Isaiah 53. 5; 1 Peter 2. 24.

‡ John 19. 30.

from the lips of the crucified Redeemer, as He meekly "bowed His head and gave up the Ghost." The work which His Father had given Him to do was accomplished—that mighty work, which has ransomed us from eternal death. He was ready to return to His glorious home—to His Father who is in heaven. Can we then wonder, as we read in St. Matthew's Gospel, That "when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earth-quake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly." They then were forced to acknowledge, what they had presumed to doubt before, that He was "the Son of God." *

You must kneel humbly, and pray for strength to "take this holy sacrament to your comfort." You must have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of His death."

In approaching the communion table, my dear Children, do not be alarmed by any superstitious fear. The particular substances chosen, the bread and the wine, have an evident and peculiar fitness to represent that spiritual food, which is to nourish our souls—we use that food, which strengthens and refreshes our bodies, as the fittest emblem of the grace, which strengthens and refreshes our souls. You must come to this holy feast with

* Matt. 27. 54.

your hearts filled with love, love not only to God but towards man. Thus, you see, some preparation is necessary before we can "presume to eat of that bread and drink of that cup."* It is also shewn, still more plainly, that this is required, in the instruction given on another occasion by our Lord to His disciples, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; *first* be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."† Does not this shew you the necessity of a careful and rigid self-examination?

The proper effect of this honest mental survey is, to bring us to the table of our Lord with our faults repented of, and our sins forsaken. To be able to present yourselves purely and acceptably, it is necessary that this self-communing should be undertaken in time, and previously to your coming to the holy table.

You must ask yourselves, Do I repent truly of my former sins, stedfastly purposing to lead a new life? Have I a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of His death? and am I in charity with all the world?

There is no way so likely to lead to amendment, as the remembrance of former faults, with sorrow

* 1 Cor. 11. 28.

† Matt. 5. 23, 24.

for having committed them. Repentance looks to the future, as much as to the past; and that essential part of repentance, a determination to reform what has been amiss in your hearts, which is only done by God's assistance, can alone render Christ's atonement available to your salvation. As you are stedfast and honest in your purpose, so only may you look for your Almighty Father's favour and protection.

When Christ himself preached, His exhortation ran thus: "*Repent ye, and believe the gospel;*"* and it is not likely that He will now receive sinners, and give them the higher comforts of His grace on any other condition, than that on which He admitted them at first to be His disciples.

Unless you have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, you will indeed want the very spirit of Christianity; for this is the fountain of all love towards God, of all desire to please; of all zeal to serve Him. You must have faith, undying, persevering faith; without which, St. Paul tells us, it is *impossible to please God*.†

Joined to this faith in God's mercy must be a thankful remembrance of Christ's death.

We adore the goodness of our Creator; in all His works we see and acknowledge His Majesty;

* Mark 1. 15.

† Heb. 11. 6.

the whole earth is filled with his glory : ought we not, then, to prize the fountain, by which that goodness is derived to us ? The Holy Supper is itself ordained to preserve the remembrance of his precious death “until his coming again.” *

While you remember this, let your hearts be filled with thankfulness for it. And, lastly, you must be in charity with all men. We are all members of one great family, for whom the Son of God died—we must live as brethren. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind.” † Let us not, then, at any time, be “extreme to mark what is done amiss,” ‡ knowing how much we have to fear God’s anger against ourselves ; but let us think gently and kindly of the failings and weaknesses of our friends or neighbours. The same just Judge watches over all. He sees our inmost thoughts. He calls back the wanderer to His fold. Let us be intent on securing our own salvation ; and let us not judge how near, or how distant a companion may be from that eternal home, to which we must all hope and pray to go.

I am now drawing near to the end of my letters to you, my dear Children ; they have been principally addressed to those among you who will soon become Candidates for Confirmation.

* See Communion Service, and 1 Cor. 11. 26.

† 1 Cor. 13. 4.

‡ Psalm 130. 3.

I have endeavoured, so far as I was able, to explain to you some parts of the Church Catechism; and I assure you I have found my occupation a most pleasant duty. May I hope that I have been understood?

You know that, in our Church, Confirmation has generally been; considered as preparatory to the receiving of the Holy Communion. My object has been, to impress upon your minds the great importance of both these rites. You will, I trust, feel it a holy pleasure, as well as a religious duty, after having received Confirmation, to profess yourselves true servants of our blessed Lord. You must meekly approach the table, and partake of that heavenly feast provided for you. You must shew your deep love and reverence for your Saviour, by accepting with thankfulness the emblems of His death and passion, which at His table will be offered you by the priest appointed by the Church. And I trust that I may see you—not only once, but frequently returning to partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Let not an opportunity pass by, but go constantly and humbly, and eat of that heavenly food, which is ordained for the strengthening and refreshing of your souls. Let me see you anxious to obtain God's favour. Ask for spiritual strength, and *feed upon the spiritual food of Christ's* "most pre-

cious Body and Blood"* by faith. Be not alarmed, nor deterred from receiving it, by any thing which is contained in the address which is read to you before the bread and wine are administered ; for there is in it much to encourage you. You are commanded to bewail your own sinfulness, and to confess yourselves to Almighty God, from whom no secrets are hid—to determine on amendment of life ; if you have done wrong, or defrauded any, to make restitution ; and if any have offended you, to forgive freely and unhesitatingly, as you will yourselves hope to be forgiven. Those only, who do not repent, but go on in wilful sin, are cautioned against receiving this Holy Sacrament. There may yet be some, who are so scrupulous, that they are distrustful of their own fitness to approach the sacred feast ; to them the minister will speak in words of encouragement, and will give them such counsel and advice, as may remove their scruples. Let me entreat you, in all love, to listen to the words of that exhortation ; and I will hope, that, as you have attained a firm resolution to walk, with God's assistance, in the right way, you will press forward with eagerness to be admitted to the banquet, and to partake with humility of the Body and Blood of your Lord. Do not stand still ; but daily press forward towards the prize of your high calling in

* Prayer in the Communion Service.

Christ Jesus. Your labour will not be in vain. The Lord's right hand will be stretched out to help and to save you, and His Holy Spirit will guide you; trusting in God your Father, you will "draw water out of the wells of salvation." *

And now, for a time, Farewell. My earnest prayers are with you, and will be ever for you, that, as you kneel meekly and humbly to receive the benediction of Christ's Church at Confirmation; and, afterwards, when you approach with reverence and humble piety His Holy Table, spiritually to eat His Body and to drink His Blood, so, when the Lord God shall gather you together in the great harvest, your souls may be so cleansed thereby, that He may in His mercy receive you into glory. § May the Lord God bless you, and keep you, and may He lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you peace now and for ever." † You must pray also for yourselves; and O may you thus "go from strength to strength, until unto the Lord of Hosts appeareth every one of you in Zion." ‡

Think of me, always, as

Your affectionate Mother,

SARA AGNES DICKEN.

* Isaiah 12. 3. † Numbers 6. 24, 26. ‡ Psalm 84. 7.

§ Psalm 73. 24.











